

Summary

NPS Winter Use Roving Team Meeting with State of Idaho

Date: November 1, 2005

Location: JR Williams Building, Boise, Idaho

Present: Frank Achana, Jeff Cook, Terry Mansfield, Craig Bledsoe, Martin Bauer, Carl Wilgus, Colby Cameron, Nedra Chandler, John Sacklin, Mike Yochim, Denice Swanke

1) Purpose agency/group or NPS gave for wanting a visit at this time: To have a relatively unorchestrated opportunity for dialogue about the winter use planning.

2) Results of this visit and/or next steps:

(in no particular order)

- Jeff Cook will share data on Idaho regional visitation and registrations with NPS. He will cc the Idaho distribution list at the same time for everyone else's information.
- John Sacklin will send Jeff Cook previous social research results.
- Carl Wilgus gave Denice Swanke the "economic impact in 2004" report containing county level data from Idaho.
- NPS is conveying the scenarios to the modelers. James Wu, from ARS, the NPS modeling contractor, will contact state agency people in Idaho, Wyoming and Montana directly within the next few weeks regarding the modeling.
- The winter use memorandum of understanding, that sets out the process agreement between NPS and the cooperating agencies, will be completed around the end of November.
- Carl Wilgus will contact the tourism directors (Betsy B and Diane S) in Montana and Wyoming about a celebration of Yellowstone this winter. Tourism directors are coming together in the park in early March. For this, maybe a January event could be planned.
- As the primary MOU contacts doing the information sharing, NPS (John Sacklin) will communicate with Carl Wilgus (Idaho) regarding the narrowed set of alternatives that emerges after these scenarios pass through the NPS screen of scoping comments, modeling reports, additional input from cooperators and non-governmental organizations, NPS responsiveness to purpose and need, and so on.

3) Points raised:

NPS participants noted:

- NPS is about to give the modelers these 10 scenarios who will give NPS back some analysis associated with each (see NPS powerpoint presentation material for reference).
- NPS will share these scenarios in a newsletter shortly, and send out to full list of interested stakeholders so that everyone can see the range of scenarios now under consideration.
- As the monitoring reports are finalized, they are being posted on the website for reference by anyone interested.

- Current participation idea that goes beyond the published agency and public participation plan is to bring governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders together for face to face opportunities for dialogue – at least by April or May 2006.
- NPS will get Northwind's report on scoping comments on or around the middle of November and then it will be posted on the website for everyone with an interest. NPS got about 35,000 scoping comments and has been reviewing the substantive comments as they came in, but this will include the full report on comments.
- Last winter under the temporary plan, NPS said law enforcement issues around winter use were reduced, and so were wildlife-human interactions.
- Providers of services in the parks might say it was a tough winter economically. How much of that was climate driven.
- Winter severity index is used in tough winters to gauge possible controls or limits on non-motorized users (e.g., where skiers are allowed).
- Along the lines of special study, the NPS intent is to work with snowmobile manufacturers on sound issues – e.g., to simplify the sound testing. That's a special project.
- NPS has been working toward winter use stability. For the life of the temporary plan, NPS is attempting to make the situation as stable and predictable as possible, to minimize confusion about what a visitor can and can't do.

Idaho participants noted:

- Rental registrations have dropped significantly in Fremont County partly as a result of operators in Yellowstone reducing their fleet according to the demand. They are dependent on three types of registrations: resident, rental, and non-resident registrations. In Fremont county, the kicker is if you get reduction on rental registrations it represents a significant reduction overall.
- Even if it's there's caution around treating such a day as a useful "data point" it could it be a positive event to communicate to people that the park is open and that it's great to come visit and celebrate the parks in the winter.
- On the idea of a one-time monitoring event, here's a caution: you won't be able to predict whether you have perfect or poor meteorology, which makes one day's monitoring less useful. Need continuous monitoring or very regular, say once a month events and monitoring of those.
- It's easy to see why traditional users may not have an interest in visiting the park with a guide, yet others will enjoy and value that guided experience. It's a shift.
- We resource managers stay tuned and we meet annually with the two states and we work on issues, for example, cover, certain species, and habitat degradation. It may be the most featured resource-based comments on this winter use planning will be from Wyoming and Montana.

4) Questions asked:

- 1) What are some things you found out in carrying out the temporary plan?
- 2) It seems like NPS thinks the temporary plan has turned out to be an improved way to handle things, why was NPS impressed with how it was in the parks last winter?

- 3) Have you had the ability to use adaptive management in implementing the temporary plan?
- 4) Is there any opportunity for example for unguided access? Is there any opportunity to allow that opportunity this year?
- 5) What effect do you think fuel prices might have on winter use this year?
- 6) What about dog sledding? Is it, or was it ever, allowed or is it the only form of non-motorized oversnow travel prohibited? What about horse-drawn sleds?
- 7) What kind of air quality monitoring do you do now?
- 8) Regarding Grassy Lakes – will the scenarios have detail about the Grassy Lake road?
- 9) How have the operations been affected in past few years at Flagg Ranch?
- 10) Within the plan moving forward, is adaptive management assumed to be part of any set of management approach?
- 11) Would it be worthwhile to create a capacity day for NPS as a sound and air quality measurement opportunity? Would it be useful?
- 12) Is there someone monitoring the bison this winter?
- 13) With continuing milder winters, won't that cause continuing adaptation of animal behavior?
- 14) What does commercially guided mean, specifically?

5) Parting comments/reflections from participants:

- Good presentations, to the point and specific enough. Comfortable about where we are, and it's good to know the status of the MOU.
- Enjoyed this. The scenarios are broad. Interested to see them narrowed to three or four and see broader response to them.
- MOU says we're not expecting an intense role as a cooperating agency and that expectation and understanding is fine.
- It was useful hearing about the scenarios.
- I appreciate the time and attention to this. It was good to get the benefit of NPS thinking and good to trace how the current situation is linked back to the history. Now it will be interesting to see NPS step from this to the narrowed set of alternatives.
- Concern about the featured event we discussed here today. The idea of generating a capacity day to get data is not very strong, but if it's about showcasing management actions done with local communities that's another thing altogether. Clarity about what you/we/everyone gets out of it is key.
- Encourage NPS to take a harder look at visitor satisfaction and the social research that goes into the EIS.
- Thanks all around.

END